



Dana E. Blackwell
Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW
DR. HARRIETTE WILLIAMS, CHAIR

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **August 2, 2004**, in room 140 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Patricia Curry
Joyce Fahey
Phalen G. Hurewitz
Helen Kleinberg
Daisy Ma
Christina S. Mattingly
Sandra Rudnick
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette Williams

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Carol O. Biondi
Brenda Galloway
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Trinity Wallace-Ellis, Youth Representative

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the August 2, 2004, meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the June 21, 2004, were approved as amended.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Chair Williams thanked Vice Chair Biondi for chairing last week's meeting in her stead, and expressed appreciation to Commission staff for their support.
- A conference is being held tomorrow in Pasadena for county partners and families providing foster care. A press release was mailed to Commissioners.
- The Beyond the Bench conference is scheduled in San Jose in September.
- On August 13, a half-day retreat—1:30 to 5:00 p.m. on the fifth floor at Shatto Place—will prepare for the meeting with representatives of the Federal government regarding the performance improvement plan.
- The Commission bylaws were changed last December to allow Commissioners to determine each year the number of Vice Chairs to be elected. Before Commissioner Fahey can begin her work as chair of the nominations committee, she needs to know the number of slots to be filled. Discussion ensued about whether to permanently change the number of Vice Chairs to two (a bylaws change that would need 30 days' notice prior to a vote) or to choose that option for this year only. Commissioner Fahey moved that the Commission elect two Vice Chairs this year; Commission Kleinberg seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dr. Charles Sophy presented the Director's Report in the absence of Dr. David Sanders.

- This year's group home contract is considerably more outcomes- and performance-based than in the past, with a three-fold focus on safety, permanency, and well-being/education. Walter Chan, contracts manager for the department, reported that the Request for Statements of Qualifications (RFSQ) was released in May; answers to 95 questions from prospective contractors were recently issued as an addendum. The deadline for submissions is August 18. The Board of Supervisors should formally approve the list of contractors sometime in September, and the new contracts will go into effect November 1, 2004. The contract mainly addresses RCL 7 through 12 facilities, though programs working in conjunction with the Probation Department could be RCL 4 or 5.

Both Commissioner Kleinberg and Commissioner Sorkin asked about the age range of children served under this contract, with Commissioner Sorkin citing circumstances in which a young child placed with older children was abused in care. Dr. Sophy explained that team decision-making determines the treatment needs of the child, and contractual issues are seldom involved.

Commissioner Hurewitz asked about measuring the success of the outcomes-oriented contract, and what had been budgeted for dedicated staff to do those assessments. Commissioner Curry asked for specifics on the data collection system to be put into place, emphasizing that it must parallel the contract's outcomes. Mr. Chan said that a

variety of sources—CWS/CMS, the child's case file, and information from the Auditor-Controller's office—would contribute to a comprehensive monitoring system. The department will work with group homes to get needed data, which will be tracked by the individual regional offices. Commissioner Kleinberg believes that the responsibilities of children's social workers will need to be made very clear, as well as what will be gleaned from group home quarterly reports.

Chair Williams commented that, at the beginning of the nearly year-long process of drafting the new contract, many group homes had registered their reluctance to transition to an outcomes-based approach, citing a number of reasons. Those concerns—plus the data, resource, and accountability issues raised today—need to be discussed. Dr. Sophy will ask Angela Carter to make a presentation at a future Commission meeting. If Commissioners have further questions, they were asked to submit them to the Commission office.

- As announced, the retreat to prepare for the performance improvement plan meeting will take place on August 13. The goal of the meeting is to make sense of and synthesize the numerous initiatives currently on the table, and Commissioners are encouraged to attend. Other invitees include Judge Nash, the Chief Administrative Office, Miriam Krinsky, Jacquelyn McCroskey, and Genie Chough.

WORK GROUP REPORT—Permanency

The Chief Administrative Office contracted with Sharon G. Watson in September 2003 to develop a plan for increasing permanency for Los Angeles foster youth ages 14 years and older. The passage of AB 408 expanded the focus of permanency to caring connections for foster youth ages 10 and older, and the Probation Department and the Commission's Relative Caregiver Committee have also been working on related issues. The permanency work group, co-chaired by commissioners Curry and Hurewitz, has examined how these four areas might work together.

- One recommendation of Dr. Watson's report was the establishment of 'cold case cowboys,' retired social workers and others who would work with foster youth to uncover caring connections from their past that might provide lifelong adult relationships. Trish Ploehn reviewed the Permanency Partners Program (P³), which is collaborating with the Consortium for Children to recruit and train mediators to work toward this goal with foster youth. The program pilot will begin with 50 youth at the department's Lakewood office; an eight-hour training for mediators will take place this Friday. As word has spread about P³, a number of other organizations have expressed enthusiasm about joining in, including the California Community Foundation, kinship caregivers, All Saints Church in Pasadena, and the Probation Department. (Another major permanency initiative is the integration of adoption and concurrent planning, now under discussion with the union.)

The P³ pilot is currently funded by the state, and dollars for any expansion must be found. Some options being explored are using MacLaren Children's Center funds (as suggested by Board deputies), transferring monies from elsewhere within the depart-

ment's budget, and an Adoption Opportunities grant that has been applied for. If received, the last would offer \$400,000 per year for four years.

In response to an inquiry from Commissioner Sorkin about why the P³ pilot would take place in SPA 7, Ms. Ploehn explained that most of the mediators involved were coming from Orange County. An expansion is planned for the Covina area.

- Commissioner Curry thanked consultant Stacey Savelle (retired from the department) and Lisa Mandel of the Children's Law Center for all their work around AB 408, and Ms. Savelle reviewed the law's two-part implementation. The quality-of-life piece strives to ensure a foster youth's ability to engage in age-appropriate social, enrichment, and extracurricular activities using the 'prudent parent' model. The permanency piece strives to ensure that no youth leaves the foster care system without a lifelong connection to a committed, caring adult. The law deals primarily with foster youth ages 10 and older placed in group homes. Though legal permanency remains the goal for these youth, the importance of emotional bonds is also recognized.

Training begins in September on both aspects of AB 408. A change in culture within the department will be necessary to nurture these lifelong connections, a change that will incorporate:

- Training and communication
- Involving youth in decisions about their lives
- Collaborating to maximize resources
- Providing ongoing support to these relationships
- Helping youth identify potential connections, and creating them if none can be located within the youth's history
- Developing the roles of group homes and caregivers within the process, making it part of the group home contract
- Creating protocols for outreach and training
- Identifying dollars to support the law's implementation
- Measuring outcomes

The department is exploring a pilot program in SPA 3, which has the largest concentration of group homes and where All Saints Church and Casey Family Programs have a strong mentoring presence that could keep lifelong connections in mind. A mentoring infrastructure within the department does not yet exist, and a point person and marketing program will be needed.

Paul Freedlund said that funds for a centralized point person are possible; the department's emancipation division is now implementing a redesign, but mentoring and lifelong connections go beyond the scope of emancipation. Dr. Sanders has made it clear that, important as lifelong connections are, he doesn't want them to dilute the permanency thrust within the department. Commissioner Hurewitz sees the two as complementary waystations on a continuum of possibilities, and concurred with the need for one individual to be at the helm.

Mr. Freedlund noted that Miriam Krinsky from the Children's Law Center had studied the quality-of-life aspect of AB 408, which seeks to ensure that foster children have no barriers to experiencing the normal activities of childhood. The department is currently working with County Counsel on training for supervisors and staff, and an FYI page is contained on its website. Staff will also need to learn how to discuss options for lifelong partnerships with youth so as to minimize disappointment if individuals identified by the youth choose not to be involved. Relationships already established should always be explored before new connections are sought.

Another requirement of AB 408 is that children age 10 and older be individually noticed of all court appearances. Part of the department's responsibility will be to help them understand what that means. Clinical reports on the child are generally attached to any court notice, and making sure children are not blindsided by that information is important. They are often told there will be no change resulting from a court date, Commissioner Fahey said, and this procedure could be used as an opportunity to prepare them for dialogue with the judge.

Regarding lifelong connections, Commissioner Fahey suggested using the court-appointed special advocates at CASA, as well as the judges themselves, as resources; reinitiating due-diligence searches for absent parents and grown siblings could also be fruitful. Commissioner Kleinberg urged more attention to the issue of siblings, since 54 percent of children are not placed with their siblings.

Commissioner Fahey further recommended exploring beyond a child's perception of a placement from which they have been removed; the child may be angry and blame the adults, yet the removal may have been for reasons having nothing to do with the adults. On recontact, they may very well be interested in a relationship with the child.

- Carol Ritchie from the Probation Department said that Probation youth have many of the same issues as DCFS youth, and Probation wants to be an active part of efforts toward permanency. Since 2000, it has been implementing AB 575 and is now following Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) guidelines. It has a quality assurance program that monitors cases to ensure that concurrent planning addresses permanency, safety, and well-being, with the ultimate goal of reunification if possible.

Probation currently has 2,400 youth in out-of-home care; of 2,200 active cases, 1,471 (67 percent) are placed in group homes, and 147 youth are placed with relatives or nonrelatives. Since the implementation of AB 575, visitation rates have improved and there is over 90 percent compliance with case plans. AB 636, the outcome measurement and accountability initiative, is also being incorporated into the department's work. The 70 deputies who handle line cases are being continually trained in techniques such as family group decision-making. Three staff function as permanency planning liaisons, trying to locate absentee parents, etc.

One barrier to permanency is that Kin-GAP funds are not available to relatives who agree to take a child. Other barriers include the lack of a statewide system for tracking

data, and the inability to share information between departments (22 percent of Probation cases come from DCFS, but the data cannot be shared). Commissioner Hurewitz recommended working with DCFS, especially on training issues. Commissioner Curry acknowledged that establishing permanency and adoptions divisions within Probation would be prohibitively expensive, but suggested contracting through DCFS or integrating those services.

- Recommendations from the Children's Planning Council in February spurred the creation of three work groups co-chaired by the Commission, on prevention, reunification, and permanency. Chair Williams introduced the *Permanency Goals/Resolutions/Solutions* report prepared for the Board of Supervisors by the Commission's Relative Caregiver Committee. The document incorporates elements from Dr. Watson's report on permanency for foster youth ages 14 and older, and also considers the unique population in relative care. Chair Williams gave full credit to a very active and collegial committee, and recognized particularly the participation of Delia Johnson from the Community College Foundation, Commissioner Nina Sorkin, and Shirley D'Angelo, who staffed the effort.

Though the group's focus was on permanency, it also came up against systemic issues within the department having to do with relative care. The definition of permanency included on page 4 of the report is key, emphasizing emotional connections between adults and youth, with a legal connection where possible.

Committee members Russ Carr, Gloria Waldinger, and Madeline Jackson presented the proposed solutions and resolutions for the 12 goals included in the report:

1. A change in the culture
2. Increased levels of resources and support
3. A workforce knowledgeable and committed to the provision of kinship issues
4. The inclusion of youth in permanency decisions
5. The inclusion of family and extended family members in permanency decisions
6. Policy and practices that address the language, culture, and service needs of a diverse population
7. Increased and improved post-legal placement services
8. Expanded educational advocacy
9. Successful transitions to permanence and emancipation
10. Effective and streamlined Interstate Compact (ICPC) processes
11. A supportive, responsive, and consistent ASFA 1997 approval process
12. A reformed and responsive CLETS/LiveScan system

The report's first set of charts delineates indicators and outcomes for each goal, while the second set of charts details the solutions, timelines, and who will be responsible. Appendix G sets forth some alternate indicators for measuring outcomes.

Commissioner Sorkin noted that the Children's Law Center was not listed under those responsible for any goal except 5, though they could be involved in more. Under goal

7, she wondered if the pressure to accept Kin-GAP experienced by relative caregivers with special-needs children is a result of inadequate training or a push to decrease caseloads. She also questioned where mentors could meet with youth.

Mary Ann Smiley, a Probation quality assurance permanency planner who serves in the Van Nuys and Crenshaw offices, again stressed the similarity of Probation and DCFS clients, saying that Probation lacks funds to implement certain initiatives, but wants to continue to participate in groups such as these. She reiterated Probation's lack of access to Kin-GAP as being a particular challenge.

Several report appendices detail discussions with relative caregivers and foster youth; notes from a youth summit are yet to be included. Delia Johnson said that the timelines listed for each goal may be unrealistic, considering the number of partners that need to be on board, but are a beginning. Commissioner Hurewitz encouraged looking at additional timelines and where the money to fund this plan will come from.

Dr. Sharon Watson said that different aspects of the department's overall permanency thrust have sprung from the different needs of the youth populations placed in group homes, in foster care, through foster family agencies, and with relatives—the last encountering some of the biggest barriers. The Permanency Partners Program will attempt to work with all four populations. The short-term strategy is to implement a youth permanency initiative with 1,500 youth. As the department finalizes that design and assigns a point person, it will look at the recommendations across all reports, convene an advisory board, and arrange for training and a kick-off conference.

Commissioner Kleinberg commented on the immense training package needed for the permanency culture change within the department and group homes, as well as other partners. Angela Carter is involved with those discussions, and Dr. Sophy said that the training piece would be brought to the Commission.

The challenge Commissioners now face is weaving together the reports from this morning so they can be useful at the August 13 preparation meeting, and so that the Board deputies can be apprised of their evolutionary state. Ultimately, they will need to be made into one plan, the deadline for which can be set on August 13. Commissioner Rudnick moved that the Commission accept the permanency reports heard today; Commissioner Sorkin seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Patricia Mulcahey requested a copy of the June 21 Commission meeting minutes. She then related several situations in which she and caregivers for her autistic son had come into conflict, and made allegations about several social workers using multiple Social Security numbers.
- Roné Ellis requested 15 ESP coloring books for distribution at a local hospital.

MEETING ADJOURNED